

**Oakdale Civic Association
General Monthly Meeting
May 9, 2011**

Officers

President:	Carol Schwasnick	Present
Vice President:	Stan Feldman	Present
Treasurer:	Pat Kassten	Present
Corresponding Secretary:	Brian Bast	Present
Recording Secretary:		
Directors:	Cathy Cohen	Not Present
	Ray Carta	Present

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Meeting called to order:

President Carol Schwasnick called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance at 7:34 pm.

President Schwasnick presented the minutes from the April meeting and requested a motion to accept as written. Member Joanne Festa made a motion, Linda Hart seconded.

Member Linda Hart requested a vote by the membership for a contribution of \$200 for flags to line Montauk Hwy. Vice President Feldman made a motion, Chuck Triolo seconded.

Treasurer's Report: Pat Kassten

Pat provided an update on income and expenditures and membership to date.

President Schwasnick requested a motion to waive the rules of the meeting to accommodate tonight's guest speakers. The membership made a motion and seconded. President Schwasnick then introduced the evening's guest speaker, Mr. Kevin O'Brien the Connetquot Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance to present information on the upcoming District Budget vote.

Guest Speaker: Mr. Kevin O'Brien, Connetquot Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance

Mr. O'Brien noted that the budget vote is next Tuesday May 17. He stated that the district has made an attempt to keep budget down for 2011-2012. The tax levy increase for a passed budget is 3.95% with a 1.92% expenditure increase and there are no staff cuts but there is some elimination of positions by attrition and not rehiring. If the budget fails we go to contingency budget. 1.54% expenditure increase. 3.39% increase tax levy. An approved budget has a \$300 average annual increase per household, while this would be \$257 per household annual increase for failed budget.

A failed budget would eliminate 26 additional positions and would mean that a fee would be adopted for facilities usage on top of custodial overtime.

Vice President Feldman asked a question, "How many houses are assessed at 50K, many houses are over that in the district so it's more of an annual increase." VP Feldman referred to historical factors - and that the overall tax rate going back to 1999 was much lower.

Member Brian Lowery noted that if you have a child in the schools you are bombarded with calls,

and those without children in the district do not do not receive a phone call about the budget vote. He noted that the bond vote in February passed by a very narrow margin on a day that it snowed where around 600 people voted, around 400 voted yes. Mr. Lowery commented that the district must notify everybody who is paying taxes and everyone should receive phone reminders. Mr. O'Brien noted that he'd take that comment back to central office for review.

Mr. O'Brien continued noting that the JV9 sports teams have been reinstated to next year's budget – changed some funding to accommodate. President Schwasnich asked a question about any changes to middle school sports programs, and Mr. O'Brien responded that this budget contains no changes to these.

A member mentioned noticing that school parking lots are often really packed at night and wanted to know who was using the schools and if they were paying. Mr. O'Brien responded that often the schools themselves hold evening events, which could be what residents have observed.

A member commented that the fact that 20 teachers assistants will be getting laid off if the budget fails is not on the first page of the Notebook that was recently mailed, and should have been handled more prominently. Mr. O'Brien noted that the American Restoration and Recover Act provides the funding to retain teachers, and this is being applied to keep jobs. This funding goes away next year however. A member pointed out that it is not easy to determine exactly how this money is being used, though.

A member made a comment that she has a son in HS and it seems that there are many electives that are not terribly academically oriented – such as a class on "Lord of the Rings" that she is aware of, and wondered if these could be an area to be targeted to reduce spend since they don't seem like requirements for graduation.

A member asked the question about the Alternative HS, which is for students that were otherwise suspended. The membership requested clarification as to why this program is required and Mr. O'Brien responded that it is important to educate those students so that they can hopefully be productive in society. This program is now folded back into the school, and run through BOCES.

Member Brian Lowery noted that the message being sent by the district is that there is not much of a decision to be made between a passed and failed budget. People have decided already rather than attending the meeting to hear more about it.

Councilman Steven Flotteron arrived and was introduced. He noted he is here to listen and would try and stay after the meeting to discuss any issues of interest.

Meet the candidates: Connetquot Board of Education

Vice President Feldman introduced the candidates – with Incumbents on one side, and challengers on the other. He noted all questions would be write-in and read by him so as to limit any potentially confrontational issues.

The candidates are:

Incumbent Lee Kennedy vs. Deana Barbaro

Incumbent Mike Kealey vs. Leo Marinick

Each candidate was permitted a brief introduction

Q1: The first question was about the impact of tax caps:

Lee Kennedy (LK): Tax caps: we have reserves but you would have to be firing people and there would be layoffs. If we had a cap this year there would be layoffs of about 30 people.

Mike Kealey (MK): Tax caps will severely impact how school districts operate. Will eventually run out of the reserves. This year the reserves were brought down from 12 to 9 million. We can maybe manage this way for another 3 years.

How can a governor with a democratic assembly sit there and tell us he believes in a 2% cap. It makes no sense. Republican leadership has not asked for 2%. Until assembly makes that determination won't happen.

Deana Barbaro (DB): Agrees it would increase class size and layoff teachers.

Leo Marinick (LM): Will be devastating to the students. Parents are not allowed to fundraise any more to alleviate burden on district. Fundraising teaches kids to work for what they want. These are things he will look at if elected.

Q2: Do you have any family members working in the district

Lee

I have a son who is 26 years old in 2009 he and 500 other kids were unemployed. He applied as an uncertified sub. In Nov 2009 they called him for one day's work. Today there is no one in my family working for the district.

All others: No.

Q3: It is getting harder to maintain quality education for students. What action will you take to make sure quality education is maintained?

LK: Education first. Look at different things we can cut. Look at the extracurricular stuff. Must look at better and more innovative ways to teach. I helped bring in a core for next year called virtual enterprise. It includes accounting, marketing – it is a global program - they Skype. If things get bad education is #1.

MK: Our primary function is to educate students. You will always need resources there to do that. 70% of your school budget is salary. Only way to make cuts is through employee reductions. Everything else has to get put on the table in challenging economic times.

LM: Our #1 job is the education of our children. The waste we see: the sprinklers were on the day it rained, the lights are on when no one is there. Start with the simpler stuff to save money.

DB: Educational is the priority but must weed out waste in programs. Search for grants to fund some programs.

Q4: What is your position on salary increases for administrators? Currently there is talk of \$175K cap for superintendents.

DB: I believe everyone is hard working and deserves a raise but in this economy may it not be possible. Concessions may not be necessary.

LM: how can you talk about giving a raise at the top when talking about firing a lunch aide?

Q5: Have you voted yes for administrative raises and why?

LK: Board members have lobbied for a \$20K increase at retirement to go along with the superintendent's pension. It's unconscionable and there is no reason. He's not getting a raise, but there is a bonus. Why is that different?

MK: Over my 9 years on the board I have voted yes on administration raises, I have done so on the recommendation of the Superintendent. The board makes the decisions on salary and that is done annually. At times the Superintendent has agreed to take a zero percent increase.

Q6: Budget Advisory Committee. This was eliminated last year – what is your position on bringing it back?

LK: I support bringing it back. We have gone to a survey where people write in what they think. The results say that they want everything but do not want to pay more. The BAC should come back because they go through the budget line by line. They analyzed it - the community looking at the budget.

MK: The Board made a decision last year to change the method for review and adoption of the budget. This had a very simple structure to it, and it died away at times due to lack of interest. Several years ago we got pressure to bring it back. There were a couple of recommendations that were brought up by the BAC that we did look at. The BAC was comprised of approximately 20 community organizations. Our research found a district that did a survey and we thought that was great and we should try it. If the Board decision should be to bring back the BAC then so be it. I would agree with the board either way. Have to get input from all parties and decide either way.

DB: in favor of putting it back in place. Survey had advantages as well in that it reached more people. Would vote in favor.

LM: In favor as long as it encompasses all components of the community.

VP Feldman: without it will not have the people to get involved at the right level of detail.

Q7: Are you satisfied with the reputation of our high school programs?

LK: I have been trying to talk about education for the last 4 years. The Board in general has put it to the side other than Chuck Triolo bringing in robotics. We are not competitive with other high schools. We don't have Intel or Baccalaureate, we are just investigating this now.

MK: I am satisfied and this is a work in progress always. I give tremendous credit to the administration for what they are bringing to the table in this area. I am not an academic; I hire the professionals to bring this to the table. High school 20/20 is bringing a lot of new ideas to the mix.

LM: No I am not satisfied. We are a good district but could be a great district. We can do better and that's what I will shoot for.

DB: I have no children in the HS currently, and am not up on the programs that are offered. It is something that I will look into further.

Q8: What is wrong with closing schools and what do you do with a shrinking population?

LK: The forecasts call for us to be losing 500 by 2015, then another 500 - 1000 total. Next year there is the possibility to close one school. It will save \$1M. It's a hard choice – are the populations going down enough. Must make a common sense choice to keeping it open or not.

MK: population will drive this decision. Local community will not give up easily. Political impact is really tremendous. On a downward slide now in 5 years will be on an uptick.

LK: within 10 years will lose 7.9% loss in population.

LM: Not in favor of closing schools because redistricting is painful, however population will drive it – should be a last resort.

DB: I would not be in favor to closing a school down - where families have emotional ties. Will mean layoffs and redistricting, and I would like to look for other alternatives.

Q9: What can we do for seniors with no children in the schools and cut some taxes for them, aside from the Star Program?

LK: We will be going to a nation of 80% seniors and 20% young people. Need to appreciate and understand hardship for seniors. Seniors do get a discount through the Town.

MK: It's how you define seniors. It would be nice if we could have them not pay any school tax. Having said that, most seniors have had children in the district and it's the responsibility of citizens to fund public education. The State is supposed to pick up a share of that but the burden falls on the local residents. I think the state could do a better job of addressing this and perhaps they should.

LM: I don't really know how to answer that question, I don't know what can be done to alleviate the burden. Other residents are not seniors but do not have children in the district either. I think our primary responsibility is to make sure we don't waste your money.

DB: I have parents in the district on a fixed income, so can understand the issue. Maybe something can be done on a state level. Also weeding out wasteful spending and eliminating low attended programs for contributions to the budget.

Q10: Two part question: \$20M total with the approved bond and some reserve money. We have a declining population, and recently renovated science rooms. If elected or re-elected to the board. Will you commit to bringing Intel to the district and if not will you vote against new classrooms.

LK: I believe the new classrooms were a political favor to certain groups. I believe you can move rooms to other wings and open up the classrooms. The more kids we lose the smaller we become. Adding 5 classrooms right now is not appropriate.

MK: Board put referendum up in Feb. allows the district to use \$7M and the state will fund those expenditures up to 64%. The school board will be able to look at the projects on that list and make decisions on the state aid and other funding to determine as it's worthy. This was a board decision back in Feb. This project can be addressed by the future board.

VP Feldman: does the board have to spend that \$20M?

MK: they can bond something smaller.

VP Feldman: They could decide not to spend that money.

LK: Becomes a discussion item at a board meeting after the vote.

LM: I am a little familiar with it. If we have a declining population why do we need it? If our current classrooms are subpar they should be brought up to standard. Turf field: it's nice to have, if it can reduce spend and injuries to players. Why were the turf fields not brought up when the HS was expanded?

MK: I take exception to the statement that turf fields are not necessary. The reason to do this is because the funding match from the state increases your money.

Q11: What kind of cuts from the district do you see that would not hamper academics and allow our children to compete?

LM: Extracurricular activities, sports, busing. A wide spectrum of things...we can cut everything but reading, writing science and math.

DB: Everything would have to be looked into and gone through with a fine tooth comb.

LK: Have to look at infrastructure, AP's, staffing. Keep basics and get rid of the peripheral stuff.

MK: This board and every board have started with the concept we have gone from the outside of the budget in. We always look at the extraneous lines.

Q12: Do you feel the community understands the role of the BOE?

LK: The function is to set policy, discuss goals, and oversee Superintendent, working with Civics more and other community groups. Best way to educate them. Most people are interested.

MK: Board of Ed meets biweekly. Community residents are always invited to join those groups, Hot button issues will bring in people, otherwise attendance is sparse.

VP Feldman: FYI – never had the district reach out to me. They are not reaching out. BOE is not reaching out. You need to reach out to us and you're not.

LM: How would you educate us? Coming to the Civics is one way. Provide us with email addresses and phone numbers. Would like to hear from everybody. I am in Starbucks every morning and that's a great way to talk to a lot of people.

VP Feldman: when the notebook comes out there should be emails for each board member.

Q13: Why are you a better candidate than your opponent?

LK: My experience, and time involved. I constantly go to different functions in the district. I have the time to do more service to the community that way. My opponent has not been at a board meeting recently and does not understand what is going on at the board. I don't mind being the unpopular vote, I understand the politics of the district and my opponent is a nice person that needs more experience with the district and board meetings.

MK: Simply because I am passionate about public education and can provide the services to educate the 6-7K students that we have. I understand how the systems work, and I speak from my heart and that is not the popular thing people want to hear. I am asking to be placed back on the school board. Its "we" not "me". Over time I have worked well with various boards I have served with. I bring a tremendous amount of knowledge to the board.

LM: I feel I am the better candidate - I am running for the seat not necessarily against Mike Kealy. I am home and I have the time to dedicate to the community. I am retired and am running a family. I can attend things at night. And during the day. I am on a pension and understand fixed income. I know that you are having a hard time with the taxes and want to represent everybody Ronkonkoma, Bohemia, Oakdale.

Deana: I have actively been involved and read the BOE minutes online. Lee started somewhere and times have changed. Managing a budget these days is a difficult task and the district will benefit from a new set of eyes. I am looking for the best possible education for my children as well as everyone else's in the district. I can gain the knowledge and protocol. We cannot make decisions at the expense of our children.

President's Report

President Schwasnick and Vice President Feldman provided an update on the following

Montauk Hwy Improvement Plan

Plans for upgrades to paving, sidewalks and drainage were viewed recently at Suffolk County Legislator Bill Lindsay's Office. They look comprehensive and the project is out for bid, and tentatively scheduled to start this summer. It will be the contractor's responsibility to inform residents and business owners of the schedule as it pertains to them.

Byron Lake

The fountains are not operating and the drainage grate on the south end is very damaged and not safe in appearance. Calls to the Town resulted in a response that they are aware of the situation and that the lake is on the schedule for repair this summer.

Gas Station at OB Road and Montauk Hwy.

The tanks should be going in shortly. A Planning Dept meeting was supposed to take place last Thurs to approve relocating the curb cut. If it was approved this week work should start soon.

Train Station Brick Pointing

VP Feldman noted that we should ask Chamber should work on the station brick issue since they use the structure.

Open Floor

A member brought up the stop sign on Montauk - if making a left. This is a good question to pose to the Town. Brook has a traffic light because it is a through street, and both use and visibility from Locust Ave if making a left onto Montauk are very difficult. Another member mentioned that you can't make a left onto Montauk from Bayview either.

Request motion to close the meeting, motion made and seconded by Chuck Triolo at 10pm.

Our next meeting will be on June 13 at 7:30pm.